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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: Somalia -- Reconciliation at the Top

Classified by Special Envoy John Yates for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

REF: A) Nairobi 566 B) TD 314/014447-08

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY. Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum spent February 27 in Baidoa primarily in an effort to bridge the schism between President Abdullahi Yusuf and Prime Minister Hussein (Ref A), but also to iron out concerns on the bilateral GOE-TFG relationship. Tactics for accomplishing greater inclusiveness through reconciliation are at the center of the internal TFG division and the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) weighed in behind Hussein. Tekeda Alemu, Ethiopian Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, told us the day prior to Seyoum's travels that the Ethiopian position is in line with our own, supporting the Prime Minister and his focus on dialogue versus military action, while remaining sensitive about the need to encourage President Yusuf to avoid any rupture. Seyoum warned both Yusuf and Hussein that if drastic changes are not made, Ethiopia would have to withdraw its troops. On February 28, SRSG Ould-Abdallah arrived in Baidoa and met with the President, Prime Minister, Speaker and Parliament. Also on February 28, Parliament was called into session to address the issue of reconciliation. The outcome of the Ethiopian intervention, meetings with the SRSG, and parliamentary action should positively influence the immediate direction of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government. End Summary.

Ethiopia Backs the Prime Minister

12. (S) During a February 26 telephone conversation with the Special Envoy, Ethiopian Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu outlined the perspective from Addis Ababa. In sum, Ethiopia supports Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein's reconciliation initiatives and these efforts have been with Ethiopia's full support and fullest cooperation. In the GOE's view, Hussein has made a big difference, bringing wisdom to his position, and his attempts to reach out to the opposition have made an excellent impression. The GOE is "fully satisfied" with Prime Minister Hussein, who is "what the doctor ordered", Takeda said, and we should all feel lucky that he is where he is. In the GOE view Hussein represents the future and should be backed to the fullest degree.

13. (S) Takeda stated that the military approach is no panacea and that under the Transitional Federal Charter, governance is the responsibility of the PM even though some security functions are reserved to the President. Takeda asserted that the new approach of the PM, and its successes, have caused anxiety on the part of some and a rift with President Yusuf. He continued, "In his frustration, Yusuf is directing his anger at our people (Ethiopians) on the ground." Takeda told us, "We need to assure that President Yusuf is still on board - cajole the President without undermining what the PM is doing. Both need to be encouraged."

14. (S) Tekeda concluded by telling the Special Envoy that the Government of Ethiopia is on the same page as the U.S. with "absolutely no difference" on the divide between the PM and the President. He added that such Ministers as Ahmed Abdisalam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Information, Youth and Sports, and even the Prime Minister himself, represent the "wave of the future" -- not Yusuf; and that the PM should not be asked to compromise on anything. Tekeda said that Prime Minister Hussein has taken great care to be "extremely respectful" of President Yusuf and he has not exceeded his mandate.

Ethiopian Warning

15. (S/NF) During his February 26 conversation with SE Yates, Tekeda described the upcoming mission of Minister of Foreign Affairs Mesfin Seyoum as two-fold: to help sort out the situation between the President and the Prime Minister; and, to sort out the differences between the President and "our people." (Comment: We have been told, and recent reporting has corroborated [Ref B] that Yusuf and Colonel Gebre all but came to blows in a recent discussion in which Yusuf, among other things, tried to have Gebre removed from his position. End Comment). Tekeda said Seyoum would be in for a lot of work and a series of sensitive meetings in Baidoa. Tekeda further suggested that Seyoum's mission could take up to three days, however, Seyoum arrived on the morning of February 27 in Baidoa and departed at the end of the day.

16. (S/NF) We understand from Presidential sources that Seyoum was unvarnished in his criticism of the TFG. Seyoum reportedly declared, "No progress has been made in the last three years and we are going to go home in three months if there are not dramatic changes." It seemed quite clear that Yusuf took the brunt of the criticism. At least one of the meetings was between Seyoum and President Yusuf, without either the Prime Minister or the Speaker of Parliament present. Yusuf's demeanor reportedly was that, "If it is that bad, maybe I should throw it in too". There is a string presumption that "drastic changes" or at least part of them would have to be in the security sector. (Comment: For example, removing the likes of National Security Agency Chief Mohamed Darwish and Mayor of Mogadishu Mohamed Dheere. End Comment).

17. (S/NF) The Prime Minister told us that on at least two occasions during the day, Seyoum withdrew from the meetings with the TFG. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister put the onus on the TFG leaders to come to mutual agreement on what to do and how. Both the Prime Minister and Presidency staffers tell us that these in-house consultations while the Ethiopians waited outside produced frank interchanges and a good degree of commonality; even team-building. (COMMENT: We do not think, however, that the issue of how to deal with the Mayor of Mogadishu or other war lord types was fully resolved. End Comment).

Parliament Addresses Reconciliation

18. (C) The Transitional Federal Parliament was called into session on February 28 to discuss the reconciliation issue and thereby to sanction the way forward on reconciliation. Yusuf had earlier told the Special Envoy that he would abide by whatever policy the Parliament approved. Both Yusuf and Hussein remained in Baidoa to meet with the Parliament. During the session the Speaker asserted that there was no truth to rumors of tension between President Yusuf and the Prime Minister; they were all a creation of the media. The Speaker continued by saying that divergent views were healthy and necessary, that the two leaders continue to enjoy a cordial relationship, and that the entire TFG leadership would work together in the same direction to promote reconciliation. The SRS also attended the session with Parliament and expressed the commitment of the international community to addressing the problems in Somalia and its support for the TFG.

19. (C) In the end, Parliament essentially reaffirmed its support for the program Nur Hussein had elaborated when he became Prime minister which included reaching out to all elements on reconciliation. In a February 29 conversation with SE Yates, the Prime Minister said

President Yusuf had accepted this as a TFG mandate. (Comment: Nevertheless, we understand that the President still feels that any reconciliation outreach should be conducted inside Somalia and not by traveling to opposition elements outside the country. End Comment). President Yusuf and Prime Minister Hussein returned to Mogadishu February 28 evening following the Parliamentary session. They met together the morning of February 29 to continue harmonizing their positions and at mid-day the PM was presiding over a Council of Ministers meeting.

Comment

¶10. (S/NF) With help from national and international actors, President Yusuf and Prime Minister Hussein are actively working to bridge their ideological divide. Foreign Minister Seyoum's intervention and a clear mandate from Parliament should help cobble

together an agreed path to pursue reconciliation. Three and a half years into the TFG's five-year mandate, an agreed-upon approach and plan of action toward reconciliation would be a significant achievement (albeit one that should have happened a long time ago). The alternative of festering differences among TFG leadership leading to paralysis and exploitable weaknesses would put the very foundation of the TFG at risk. End Comment.

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